UNITED NATIONS

General Assembly

FORTY-NINTH SESSION

Official Records

THIRD COMMITTEE
9th meeting
held on
Wednesday, 19 October 1994
at 10 a.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 9th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. CISSE (Senegal)

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AGENDA ITEM 95: SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE WORLD SOCIAL SITUATION AND TO YOUTH, AGEING, DISABLED PERSONS AND THE FAMILY

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Distr. GENERAL
A/C.3/49/SR.9
1 December 1994
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: FRENCH

94-81722 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 95: SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE WORLD SOCIAL SITUATION AND TO YOUTH, AGEING, DISABLED PERSONS AND THE FAMILY (A/49/24 and Add.1, A/49/213, A/49/434, A/49/435, A/49/204-E/1994/90, A/49/205-E/1994/91, A/49/287, A/49/294, A/49/307-S/1994/958, A/49/381, A/49/422 and A/49/462 and Corr.1)

1. The CHAIRMAN invited the Committee to begin its consideration of agenda item 95 and drew Members' attention to the documentation under the item, in particular document A/49/435, containing in its annex the draft plan of action to further the implementation of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons, which had been submitted to the General Assembly for action.

2. Mr. BAUDOT (Director, Division for Social Policy and Development of the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development, and Coordinator, World Summit for Social Development) introduced agenda item 95.

3. He stressed that social issues were higher on the international agenda than ever before. In a rapidly changing world, the challenge of organizing society for the promotion of the common good and the development of the individual was being given increasing prominence. The Committee could only welcome that positive development, to which it had contributed significantly. At the same time, it could not fail to note that the heightened interest stemmed precisely from the emergence of many adverse trends. While many countries were progressing on various fronts, for far too many people life remained insecure and without hope. In many areas there had even been retrogression, bringing with it such negative phenomena as violence and crime, and a social malaise was widely perceived.

4. In response to that situation, the General Assembly had decided to convene a World Summit for Social Development at the level of heads of State or Government, to be held in early 1995 in Copenhagen, at the invitation of the Government of Denmark. The Preparatory Committee for the Summit had already held one organizational and two substantive sessions, whose reports had been submitted to the Committee. The elaboration of a draft declaration and draft programme of action to be adopted at the Summit would shortly be taken up in informal consultations.

5. He recalled the Declaration on Social Progress and Development, elaborated by the Third Committee and adopted by the General Assembly in 1969. While in certain respects its text seemed out of date, at a deeper level, it remained totally relevant. He hoped that the Copenhagen final documents would stand the test of time equally well. It was important for the Summit to engage the interest of the greatest possible number of citizens in all countries and of the organizations and associations representing them. It was encouraging that roughly 500 non-governmental organizations had expressed interest in participating in the Summit.

6. To illustrate the role of the cooperative movement, he drew attention to document A/49/213 on the status and role of cooperatives in the light of new economic and social trends, in particular paragraph 55 dealing with the expansion of productive employment, the reduction of poverty and the enhancement of social integration.

7. With reference to the question of youth, he noted that the tenth anniversary of International Youth Year would be celebrated in 1995 and observed through a variety of events, including a special plenary meeting of the General Assembly. Governments were urged to consider sending delegations to that meeting from their ministries or departments responsible for youth. Representatives of non-governmental youth organizations should also take part. The plenary meeting had been scheduled for November, giving the Committee the opportunity for a final review of the draft world youth programme of action to the year 2000 and beyond, before its adoption by the General Assembly.

8. Reviewing the history of that draft, he said that the text elaborated by the Commission for Social Development (CSD) at its most recent session, in 1993, had been circulated for comment to Governments, concerned intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and appropriate bodies within the United Nations system. It would be revised in the light of the comments received and then submitted to the Committee through CSD, whose next session was to be held in New York in April 1995. It would also be adjusted to reflect decisions taken by recent major United Nations conferences, including the Cairo Conference on Population and Development and the World Summit for Social Development. The report of the Secretary-General contained in document A/49/434 also provided extensive information on the issue.

9. Turning to the issue of disabled persons, there had been several significant events over the past 12 months. The United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, adopted by the General Assembly at its forty-eighth session, had been translated into all the official languages of the Organization and several additional languages and had been widely disseminated.

10. An international conference in June 1994, attended by some 700 persons, on the topic "Beyond normalization - towards one society for all", had adopted the Reykjavik Declaration in support of those Rules. Section IV of the Rules, entitled "Monitoring mechanism", provided that the Rules would be monitored within the framework of the sessions of CSD and that, in addition, a Special Rapporteur would be appointed for three years to monitor their implementation. Mr. Bengt Lindqvist, a former Minister and current member of Parliament of Sweden with vast experience as an advocate of the rights of disabled persons, had accepted the Secretary-General's invitation to take up the position of Special Rapporteur. Mr. Lindqvist could count on the encouragement and support of the Secretariat, which was making arrangements for him to visit New York for the latter part of the Committee's debate on item 95.

11. He pointed out that, while the work of the Special Rapporteur would be partially supported from the Organization's regular budget, it would be financed

essentially from extrabudgetary resources. He thanked the countries which had made voluntary contributions to that end and those which had indicated their intention of so doing. He hoped that many others would be in a position to contribute in cash or kind to the work of the Special Rapporteur. Thanks were due to the Swedish Government for its material, technical, logistical and other support.

12. He informed the Committee that the panel of experts, primarily composed of non-governmental organizations of persons with disabilities, was in the process of being constituted. As envisaged in the Rules, the panel would be responsible for advising the Special Rapporteur.

13. In conclusion, he drew attention to the draft plan of action entitled "Towards a society for all: Long-term Strategy to Implement the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons to the Year 2000 and Beyond", which was contained in the annex to the Secretary-General's report (A/49/435). The Strategy provided a framework for collaborative action in implementing the World Programme as well as the Standard Rules. It incorporated those national, regional and global measures which had proved successful and sustainable in the course of the Decade. It envisaged national medium-term plans as the leading edge of the Strategy and suggested the component elements of a national plan, in the expectation, however, that those would be adapted to national needs, resources and aspirations. The Strategy's guiding vision was the concept of a "Society for all". The foundation of that Strategy remained the three themes of the World Programme - prevention of disability, rehabilitation and equalization of opportunities for disabled persons. It was the result of extensive consultations with Governments, through CSD and the Economic and Social Council, with specialized agencies, through the inter-agency mechanism, and with non-governmental organizations, through the expert group meeting held in Vancouver in April 1992. He hoped that the Committee would recommend adoption of the Strategy.

14. Mr. LAMAMRA (Algeria), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that promoting the dignity and worth of the human person and improving the living standards of all human beings - the social objective enshrined in the United Nations Charter and the relevant human rights instruments - was a matter of the utmost priority. If the human person was seen as the focus of all development efforts, it was clear that such efforts could not be limited by national borders. It was illusory to expect islands of well-being to endure in the midst of oceans of poverty. An affront to the dignity of the human person, whenever it occurred, affected all human beings without distinction. That was particularly true in a world characterized by globalization, where the widespread demand for economic performance and productivity jeopardized the attainment of social justice, especially during a recession and under structural adjustment programmes, in short, in a world where unequal income distribution among the different social classes meant that there were elements of the South to be found in the North and vice versa.

15. However, it was unquestionably in the southern hemisphere that poverty, unemployment and social disintegration were structural in nature and organically

linked to economic underdevelopment. Solving those problems exceeded the capacities and resources that each third world country could devote to them. The developing countries must therefore receive massive, effective international cooperation to enable them to carry their share of responsibility towards their own people and thus towards humankind as a whole.

16. The declaration and programme of action that would result from the first World Summit for Social Development must focus on that fundamental objective, while adopting a step-by-step approach for the international community to make sustained progress towards that goal. It was therefore necessary, as an indication of a new state of mind and a renewal of international cooperation for development, to reach a consensus on the following measures: incorporation of peremptory norms into structural adjustment programmes to prevent cutbacks in the budgetary resources allocated to meeting unavoidable and irreducible social needs; cancellation of the official debt of the African countries and the least developed countries and reduction of the debt of the other developing countries, with a clear commitment by all beneficiary countries to invest the resources thereby released in social development; reduction of multilateral debt for the benefit of the developing countries, along lines such as those recently considered at Madrid; allocation of IMF special drawing rights to the developing countries to finance social development projects; confirmation of the OECD countries' target of allocating 0.7 per cent of GNP to official development assistance, with an obligation for each Government concerned to draw up a schedule determined by its capabilities and constraints; strengthened and increased funding for the operational activities of the United Nations and the specialized agencies in the area of social development; and a commitment to releasing new and additional resources for social development the world over.

17. Those specific measures of international cooperation must be harmoniously integrated with quantifiable national efforts.

18. The World Summit for Social Development was an eminently political event whose impact must be historic. It must provide an opportunity to break away from the unproductive paradigms of the past and to project a generous vision of humankind's common future. Intrinsically positive concepts such as "sustainable human development" and "human security" must not be allowed to nourish sterile controversy. On the contrary, humankind must be made to take a qualitative leap so that it could approach the next millennium with the certainty of a better future.

19. Mr. FITSCHEN (Germany), speaking on behalf of the European Union and Austria, said that the World Summit for Social Development, to be held at Copenhagen in 1995, and the Agenda for Development, currently in preparation, were directly inspired by the Declaration on Social Progress and Development adopted by the United Nations 25 years previously. The fact that the Declaration treated human rights as an intrinsic and fundamental feature of social development was one of the reasons why, a quarter of a century later, it retained much of its validity and importance. The Declaration recognized the primary responsibility of each country to ensure the social progress and well-being of its people, and that of the international community for those same

concerns. For that reason, the European Union believed that the Declaration was a valuable reference for the work of the Summit.

20. Regarding people with disabilities, the European Union and Austria recalled that the most important achievement in that sphere had been the elaboration, by the Commission for Social Development, of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, adopted by the General Assembly at its forty-eighth session. Those Rules did not so much emphasize the disabilities of the persons affected as their ability to participate fully in society and sought to adapt the societal environment to the needs of persons with disabilities, rather than the other way round. He hoped that the Special Rapporteur on that issue within the Commission for Social Development would promote the implementation and monitoring of the Rules.

21. Participants in the International Conference on Population and Development had drawn attention to the fact that much remained to be done, particularly in the areas of prevention of disability, rehabilitation and participation, to achieve equality of opportunity for persons with disabilities. The European Union hoped therefore that the issue would be given particular attention at the World Summit for Social Development.

22. Regarding policies and programmes involving youth, he noted that, as the international community prepared to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the International Youth Year in 1995, the goals of the Year remained as valid as ever. The European Union and Austria had noted with interest the report of the Secretary-General on the draft world programme of action for youth towards the year 2000 and beyond (A/49/434). That document rightly emphasized the importance for young people of education and training, employment, health education and efforts to prevent drug abuse. He looked forward to the refinement of the draft by the Commission for Social Development at its thirty-fourth session, to be held in 1995.

23. He noted that many of the social questions discussed in the Committee had a particular bearing on young people and that young people felt that they had a contribution to make to solving problems in such areas as environmental protection and international development cooperation. The tenth anniversary of the International Youth Year would be particularly suited to encouraging the involvement of young people and to renewing the commitment of States Members of the United Nations to improve the situation of youth, through the adoption of the programme of action. He also recommended that consultations with young people should be organized and that arrangements should be made for youth representatives to have an input into the work of both the Commission for Social Development and the General Assembly.

24. Mr. LAMPTEY (Ghana) said that his Government had strongly supported the proposal to convene a World Summit for Social Development to advance the cause of social progress, which had hitherto been regarded only as a by-product of economic growth. Ghana had therefore been participating fully and actively in the preparatory activities dealing with the priority areas of the Summit. It welcomed the growing and emerging consensus which favoured an integrated

approach to development, giving priority to social and human development concerns. The Summit should be an occasion for mutual understanding that should pave the way for a Charter of Social Progress.

25. Despite programmes of sensitization, prevention and mobilization, some young people in Ghana, as elsewhere in the world, fell prey to problems of unemployment, drug and alcohol abuse and teenage pregnancy. His delegation hoped that the tenth anniversary of the International Youth Year would offer an opportunity to develop action-oriented programmes towards the year 2000 and beyond in order to attain better living conditions for the world's young people.

26. By proclaiming 1999 the International Year of Older Persons, the General Assembly had underscored the important place occupied in society by the aged, who were all too often overlooked by government authorities. Public and private services were being adapted to maximize senior citizens' contribution to society. His delegation fully supported the positive outlook on ageing reflected in the United Nations Principles for Older Persons and the global targets on ageing for the year 2001. That outlook coincided with the values of the extended family system in Ghana, where the aged were guaranteed pride of place for their knowledge, their wisdom and their contribution to social equilibrium.

27. His delegation was saddened by the statistical evidence that over 500 million people in the world were disabled and that 80 per cent of them lived in developing countries. About two thirds of the afflicted were women and children. Many were victims of man-made disasters such as wars and drug abuse and most were excluded from society. His Government welcomed United Nations efforts to remedy that situation by encouraging Member States to implement the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, adopted by the General Assembly at its forty-eighth session, and to contribute to the United Nations Voluntary Fund on Disability. His delegation also hoped that the problems of persons with disabilities would receive due attention at the forthcoming World Summit for Social Development.

28. Ghana considered the family, whether of the patriarchal or the matriarchal type, to be the foundation on which society was built and a major factor for social stability. It had therefore enthusiastically celebrated the International Year of the Family in 1994. His delegation hoped that the plenary deliberations to be held on the issue would bring about a future-oriented approach to viable local programmes to benefit the basic unit of society, as an agent and beneficiary of sustainable development.

29. Mr. VOS (Netherlands), speaking as youth representative of the Netherlands, said that in his country, as elsewhere, the family had changed, becoming what the United Nations had acknowledged to be a "pluriform entity". Societies should act with understanding and tolerance, rather than rejection and discrimination, towards non-traditional families and allow young people to choose the family lifestyle best suited to them, even if it was not the same as that chosen by the majority.

30. Young people were deeply concerned about the problem of inequality between rich and poor, North and South, and even within countries. Increasing numbers of children, especially in the 6 to 11 age group, were unable to attend school because they had to work to provide for their families. Measures to promote access to education and reduce the school drop-out rate should therefore be included in the proposed World Programme of Action for Youth towards the Year 2000 and Beyond. Those measures should not focus only on young people between the ages of 15 and 25; they should also take account of the situation of younger children. They could take inspiration from the plan initiated by President Nelson Mandela in South Africa, encouraging attendance at school, particularly by girls, by providing both lessons and school meals free of charge.

31. Every year, poverty and war drove thousands of migrants to settle in countries which were not their own and where, unfortunately, they were often victims of exclusion and discrimination. Their children often experienced problems of social integration and identity. The proposed Programme of Action did not adequately address the problems of young migrants. Countries should make greater efforts and devote more resources to training for first- and second-generation migrants, create jobs for them and increase the local population's awareness of cultural diversity in order to foster understanding and tolerance.

32. In a world in which hunger, overpopulation and environmental problems were a source of universal concern, the Programme of Action for Youth should provide young people with fresh opportunities to participate in the search for solutions to such problems, which they themselves would eventually have to face. In that regard, it was disappointing to note that, despite the good intentions expressed at the United Nations, only three youth representatives were present in the Third Committee. If the Organization really wanted to tackle the problems of young people, youth representatives would have to be included in national delegations. On the tenth anniversary of the International Youth Year, it was time for the United Nations to realize that young people were not the problem, but the solution.

33. Mr. PACE (Malta) said that the Committee should seize the opportunity afforded by its deliberations on agenda item 95 to focus on the issues to be discussed at the World Summit for Social Development. In so doing, it would contribute to the vital task of preparing for the Summit; to do so was, in his delegation's view, part of its mandate.

34. His Government's plan of action was based on the following principles: to guarantee social justice, with particular attention to the more vulnerable members of society; to provide social security and social welfare in all areas to every citizen; to channel welfare services through the family, as a function of the individual personality and according to the choice of each member of the family; to encourage each individual, rather than becoming a passive recipient of assistance, to participate actively in helping himself and possibly others; to ensure that solidarity was practised actively among all members of society; and to ensure the complementarity of services provided by governmental and non-governmental agencies. Under that plan of action, his Government had

enacted legislative measures to ensure social security, employment without discrimination, equality of the sexes, and equal access to education and health services. In the case of employment, special provisions had been made for marginal and disadvantaged groups, including the disabled, single parents, rehabilitated drug abusers and ex-prisoners. Resources had been made available so that welfare services could operate efficiently, and an Institute of Social Work had been established within the University of Malta for the training of social workers. The Government had also set up national commissions for youth, the elderly, the disabled and the advancement of women, and for combating illicit drug trafficking. The groups concerned were strongly represented in the relevant commissions.

35. As a result of various social and economic problems and other social phenomena, the role of the family in Malta as the source of support for its disabled, weak and elderly members was decreasing in importance. Fortunately, volunteer agencies and non-governmental organizations were active in that field; they had played a pioneering role and continued to provide psycho-social support to vulnerable groups, in cooperation with public bodies and in keeping with the plans and programmes of action adopted by the United Nations. Assistance was provided to the disabled and the elderly in the form of home help, meals delivered to the home and special telephone services to deal with emergencies.

36. Considerable realism was called for in viewing the world social situation. Current recessionary trends in the developed countries and fluctuations on money markets were affecting the economies of virtually the entire world. That situation caused social programmes to be delayed or abandoned. With greater cooperation within the international community, however, the struggle to better the quality of life for all, particularly for groups which endured increased hardship in times of national and global economic crisis, could be won.

37. In order to curb unemployment and help to promote productive employment, Member States should not only make every effort to attract investment but should also create coordination mechanisms which would enable trade unions, employees and the public services concerned to formulate responsible policies on cost-of-living wage adjustments, in other words, policies which would not end up eliminating jobs or inhibiting the expansion of productive employment. Moreover, employment agencies should be provided with increased resources for training young persons in employable skills and for retraining redundant workers.

38. In another vein, the plight of millions of children living in particularly difficult conditions, especially the victims of armed conflicts, must not be forgotten. Attention should also be focused on the plight of other children, and, in particular, on child pornography, child labour and street children.

39. Since the end of the cold war, international relations had been transformed and most States were concerned, above all, with mutual confidence-building. While the importance of the progress achieved to that end could not be underestimated, no one should be deluded: peace did not automatically signal an end to social problems. In particular, funds allocated to military budgets

should be used for social purposes with a view to improving the lot of the disadvantaged and thus reaping the so-called "peace dividend".

40. Mrs. PILOTO (Zimbabwe) said that it had been difficult to achieve a consensus on such concepts as human security and sustainable human development during the first and second sessions of the Preparatory Committee for the World Summit for Social Development. That was because delegations had not fully understood the concepts, as there had been no dialogue between the authors of the Human Development Report, where the concepts had originated, and the Preparatory Committee. Steps had since been taken in that direction but they had been too limited to ensure a comprehensive and transparent dialogue. She therefore hoped that the relevant departments of the Secretariat would remedy that situation during the current session of the General Assembly. She wished to remind the Committee that the issues of human security and sustainable human development concerned not only the Third Committee but also the Second Committee.

41. Regarding the status and role of cooperatives, her delegation was encouraged by the Secretary-General's report on the matter (A/49/213), which indicated that the cooperative movement was demonstrating a viable capacity to create employment, reduce poverty and enhance social integration. In addition, it amply demonstrated that cooperatives employed persons from all social groups - the elderly, women, youth, the disabled and indigenous peoples - who would otherwise be marginalized. Thus, the cooperative movement deserved to receive all possible support from policy makers.

42. In that specific connection, some countries still misunderstood the role of cooperatives as associations of persons for profit. That was most regrettable for, as long as that misconception persisted, policy makers would not provide cooperatives with absolutely essential legal and other support. Given that the problem persisted, the recommendation of the Secretary-General to observe an international day of cooperatives was worthy of consideration for it would make social agents and the population as a whole aware that cooperatives were not merely social clubs but rather business ventures.

43. In Zimbabwe, efforts to support and promote cooperatives had borne fruit. Cooperatives employed persons who would otherwise have been unemployed as a result of the structural adjustment programme implemented since 1990. The Government had encouraged not only service cooperatives in, inter alia, the field of housing, but also certain business ventures, in particular worker-owned companies. The Government had realized that cooperatives provided economic and social guarantees to workers, including those with a low level of education, particularly women. The Head of State himself had encouraged companies to sell their assets to their employees, greatly contributing to the success of such ventures. Similarly, employees of financially ailing companies had been encouraged to start their own economic ventures without waiting for their companies to shut down.

44. The interest shown in the cooperative movement at both the national and international levels was encouraging. None the less, the organizations of the

United Nations should support cooperatives in developing countries by providing technical and advisory assistance to them. In that connection, her delegation appreciated the efforts deployed by the International Labour Organization and called on all organizations of the United Nations to strengthen their mechanisms for providing assistance to the cooperative movement, in particular by enhancing the coordination of their work in that area.

45. Mr. GUILLEN (Peru) said that the forthcoming World Summit for Social Development would provide an opportunity to identify common denominators among countries, despite the diversity of local realities and, on that basis, to adopt measures for poverty reduction, the expansion of productive employment and the enhancement of social integration.

46. In his delegation's view, the political declaration to be adopted by the World Summit should be a clear, concise document which reflected pluralism and had ethical value. In that connection, the text submitted by the Chairman of the Preparatory Committee formed an excellent basis for negotiations. It should not reiterate ideas which had already been stressed at many international conferences held successively in recent years. Above all, the question of social development should be placed in its current context, by taking into account the fact that socio-economic gaps were a major cause of instability and insecurity.

47. While the draft programme of action was satisfactorily structured, its proportions should be reduced so that priorities were clearly established without losing sight of the overall objectives and follow-up mechanisms were strengthened.

48. While in the past the United Nations had always given preference to political questions over social questions, it must be recognized today that the solution of political conflicts depended on the settlement of social problems. Unfortunately, official development assistance, which was irreplaceable even if it only complemented national efforts, continued to dwindle and that gave cause for concern. Only the Government of Japan planned to increase its assistance significantly. Ireland, Denmark and New Zealand were the only countries which had taken initiatives to check the decline. None the less, the contribution of those countries represented but 23 per cent of total official development assistance. That situation was attributable to a slowdown in the growth of the industrialized countries.

49. Clearly, against that backdrop, a set of absolute priorities must be established. Donor countries must recognize those priorities: poverty reduction, the expansion of productive employment and the introduction of basic health and education services.

50. As a result of a programme to stabilize Government expenditure, Peru had been able to put its economic house in order, curb inflation and regain its rightful place on the international scene. Having resumed a path of growth, Peru now accorded priority to social questions. For the first time in its history, it had adopted an investment programme financed with the help of

domestic resources, which had received the backing of international financial institutions, the World Bank, UNDP and a growing number of non-governmental organizations. The programme was primarily designed to benefit the poor sectors. In particular, his Government was making every effort to channel Government expenditure into such areas as the education, basic health and food security of the most vulnerable groups and was seeking the support of civil society in the implementation of that programme. In 1995, the activities undertaken with a view to improving the quality of social services would be pursued in the light of the experience acquired during the current year. In the following years, such activities would be extended to new sectors. Already, between 1991 and August 1994, 11,800 social assistance projects, representing over $418 million, had been approved. Those projects were financed by the Fondo nacional de compensación social (FONCODES) (National Social Compensation Fund). The Fund, which served as a liaison between domestic sources of financing and international financial institutions, in some sense played the role of a social bank.

51. In view of the growing importance of the question of social development at the current juncture, his delegation planned to cooperate fully with any initiatives which might be taken in order to ensure the success of the World Summit.

52. Mr. KALLEHAUGE (Denmark) said that, from his perspective as President of the Nordic Council of Organizations of Disabled People, the highlight of the forty-eighth session of the General Assembly had been the adoption of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities. It was also encouraging that Mr. Bengt Lindqvist, former Minister for Social Affairs of Sweden, had been appointed Special Rapporteur. It was disappointing, however, that the post of Special Rapporteur had to be funded from extrabudgetary resources, a situation that had given rise to much criticism from organizations of persons with disabilities. He hoped that Member States would make the contributions that were needed to further the important work of monitoring the implementation of the Standard Rules. Good intentions were not enough. Creating equal opportunities for persons with disabilities would demand hard work, new political initiatives, investments and programmes. There would be a need for dialogue on those issues between the Special Rapporteur and Governments.

53. He wished to draw attention to rule 18, according to which States should recognize the right of organizations of persons with disabilities to represent the disabled, and should encourage and financially support the establishment of such organizations, establish ongoing communication with them and ensure their participation in the development of government policies. Based on their own experience, the Nordic countries were convinced of the validity of those recommendations and urged all Member States to give them high priority.

54. Since one person in 10 was disabled, meaning that between 500 and 600 million people world wide were disabled and that persons with disabilities were therefore the most numerous underprivileged minority in the world, it could reasonably be asked why there was not a United Nations High Commissioner for

Persons with Disabilities as there was a High Commissioner for Refugees. In section IV, paragraph 10, of the Standard Rules, it was suggested that one or more positions of interregional adviser on the implementation of the Standard Rules should be created to provide direct services to States. He felt that Governments in all regions of the world should appoint regional advisers to ensure implementation of the Standard Rules. Within the United Nations system, the Secretary-General could give higher priority to the issue by, for instance, asking UNDP to focus on disabled persons in all human development programmes and UNESCO to give more attention to special education programmes. Lastly, UNDP should complete its ongoing work on the preparation of the disability index, which could serve as an important monitoring instrument for the implementation of the Standard Rules.

55. He hoped that upcoming world conferences, in particular the Fourth World Conference on Women to be held in Beijing in September 1995 and the forthcoming World Summit for Social Development to be held in March 1995, would provide an opportunity for organizations of persons with disabilities to be present and to express their aspirations. Lastly, all strategies aimed at eradicating poverty and enhancing employment should include special provisions for disabled persons.

56. Mr. BELTRAN (Uruguay) said that his country had a tradition of social welfare that went back to the turn of the century. As early as 1877, the national education act had established the principle of universal, compulsory, free and secular education. Subsequently, thanks to the action of eminent statesmen and intellectuals, the founders of modern Uruguay, primary education had been made universal, schools had been established for disabled children and nursery schools had become widespread, so that since 1985 Uruguay's illiteracy rate had been only 4.5 per cent. Old age and disability pensions, unemployment insurance and the right to strike were among the social gains that made Uruguay one of the world's most advanced countries in terms of social development. The educational opportunities open to Uruguayans were not unrelated to the stability and progress that had characterized the country since the middle of the century.

57. The explosive expansion of knowledge, however, required an updating of educational programmes that only major investment could achieve. Current tensions, particularly in schools, were closely linked to the inadequacy of the investments made in that and other areas. Unemployment and the resulting poverty could often be attributed to a lack of vocational training. That was why the main task at present was to guarantee quality education and training for all so that everyone could have access to the job market. Without an effective education programme with the necessary flexibility to adapt to new technologies, no society could progress. Lastly, his delegation felt that the formulation of national plans in that area demanded the participation of society as a whole.

58. Uruguay's educational system was confronting the further difficulty of insufficient school premises, which had meant shortening school hours, particularly in primary and middle schools. That situation placed Uruguayan students at a disadvantage, giving rise to inequality and therefore tension. In that situation, the National Commission on the Family created under the auspices of the International Year of the Family had made lengthening school hours one of

its goals. Uruguay remained optimistic that it could achieve the goal of education for all by the year 2000.

59. Mr. CHEPSIROR (Kenya) said that his country was actively involved in the preparations for the forthcoming World Summit for Social Development and hoped that the Summit would produce commitments and programmes aimed at the eradication of poverty, the elimination of obstacles to development, the expansion of productive employment and the creation of a favourable international economic and social environment.

60. The issue of economic growth was crucial. There continued to be a sharp contrast between the industrialized countries and the developing world, particularly Africa. The situation in Africa remained of great concern because there were still no tangible signs of recovery. The continent remained highly vulnerable to inequitable international economic policies, it was a frequent victim of natural disasters and it had an overwhelming debt burden at a time when financial flows were drying up and commodity prices remained low.

61. The measures taken by the international community to improve the economic and social situation in Africa, more particularly sub-Saharan Africa, had yielded very limited results. For that reason, Kenya continued to urge that further steps be taken. Specifically, it recommended adoption of an integrated and comprehensive approach to development, the implementation of structural adjustment programmes that took into account the social dimension and provided a "safety net" for vulnerable groups, the launching of new initiatives to find a lasting solution to the debt burden, the allocation of additional resources to accelerate social development and the enhancement of personal productivity through the wider application of science and technology. Lastly, it must be recognized that social development, economic growth and political stability were inseparable.

62. While it was true that national Governments bore primary responsibility for eradicating poverty, some Governments were in a better position than others to deal with the problem. That was where international cooperation came in. In Africa, such cooperation should involve advancing educational training, scientific and technological development; developing physical and social infrastructure; strengthening institutional capacity in both the public and private sectors; and accelerating the rate of economic growth.

63. On the question of youth, which had been on the agenda of the General Assembly since its fortieth session and would once again claim the attention of the international community in 1995, the tenth anniversary of the International Youth Year, he said that in his country young people already constituted over half of the population. Sadly, the living conditions and prospects for many young people continued to deteriorate because of poverty and disruptive social change associated with rapid urbanization and the weakening of family ties and traditional support systems. For that reason, Kenya's Development Plan for the period 1994-1996 gave priority to financial support for youth education and the preparation of a national youth development policy. Other programmes had been drawn up in areas such as health and social welfare, the establishment of

income-generating projects and credit schemes to assist youths who were out of school. In addition, the National Youth Service was to receive increased assistance to enable it to expand its training activities. Polytechnics and technical training institutes had also been given the necessary funding to train young people to set up small-scale enterprises.

64. With regard to the aged, Kenya supported both the United Nations programme on ageing and the African Society of Gerontology. Like most developing countries with large rural populations, Kenya depended on traditional family ties for the care of the elderly. Those ties were now being weakened by increasing rural-urban migration. While non-governmental organizations and religious institutions were providing assistance to the elderly, his Government continued to believe that the rightful place for the aged was in the family.

65. Kenya, which had supported the adoption of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, had launched a nation-wide campaign, spearheaded personally by President Daniel T. Arap Moi, to improve the situation of disabled persons. Concern for the disabled was now part of a broad government policy. Programmes for special education and technical and craft training were increasingly being made available to them. Their participation in business and other income-generating activities was also being facilitated. The situation of the disabled was far from satisfactory but, with the help of friendly Governments and non-governmental organizations, Kenya was confident that it would progress in that area.

66. His Government strongly believed that development must focus on the family as the basic unit of society, and therefore hoped that the Voluntary Fund for the International Year of the Family, established in 1993 with a view to releasing new funds for specific family-oriented projects, particularly in developing countries, would be given appropriate attention. The family must have the necessary resources to enable it to discharge its primary responsibility of raising children and supporting those who could not support themselves due to age, unemployment, illness or physical disability.

67. His Government, which had actively participated at the International Conference on Population and Development and had endorsed the Cairo Programme of Action, was committed to improving the welfare of the Kenyan population and, through the Family Planning Association of Kenya, was working to reduce the rate of population increase and improve the health of mothers and children.

68. Mr. BOUCHER (World Bank), referring to the issue of ageing, drew attention to a major study of the problem which the World Bank had recently completed entitled "Averting the Old Age Crisis: Policies to Protect the Old and Promote Growth". As indicated in that study, the old-age crisis currently faced by the world had four basic elements. First, there was rising life expectancy and declining fertility, leading to an increase in the number of old people in the general population. Second, in both developed and developing countries, systems designed to provide financial security for the old were under strain. Third, those problems concerned not only the old, but also their children and grandchildren. Fourth, many Government-run systems were in trouble because they

tried to support all three functions of old-age financial security systems: redistribution, savings and insurance.

69. In a world in which the proportion of the population over 60 would nearly double over the next 35 years, rising from 9 to 16 per cent, more than half those people depended exclusively on extended families and other informal support. However, those systems were tending to break down under pressure of urbanization, industrialization and increased mobility. It was then that Governments typically stepped in. Governments became involved through a system of payroll taxes paid by working people. However, when the number of workers declined and the population of retirees increased, taxes also tended to increase. In Eastern Europe and parts of Latin America, for example, the payroll tax to support pensions already accounted for about one quarter of the average wage. Such systems impeded economic growth, making it increasingly difficult for Governments to keep their promise to protect the old. There were many problems. In order to avoid paying taxes, many people worked "off the books". In some countries like Hungary, where the average retirement age was 54, more than one quarter of the population was retired, and the payroll tax was 33 per cent. In Austria, Finland, Germany and Italy, one third of the public budget went to pensions; in Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, nearly one quarter of public spending went to the aged. In countries like Egypt and Venezuela, because of mismanagement, the public pension funds had lost most of their value over the years.

70. In order to overcome those problems, the central recommendation of the World Bank study was a reform of the system for financing old age pensions. The system recommended by the World Bank, instead of being a single system managed by the Government, would consist of three separate mechanisms or pillars. The first pillar, which would resemble existing systems, would focus on redistribution, providing a social safety net for the old. The second pillar, which would focus on saving, would depend directly on individual contributions and would consist of a system of mandatory privately managed contributions. Funds would be invested privately and competitively, subject to public regulation.

71. The third pillar would be a voluntary savings mechanism, which would offer supplemental retirement income for people with the means and propensity to save more. Those reforms would have the advantage of cutting pension taxes, boosting savings, stimulating private sector development and, thus, contributing to growth. Such countries as Australia, Argentina and Chile had reformed their pension systems along those lines.

72. Tackling pension reform would not be easy. Pension issues were complex and controversial. However, the World Bank believed that change in those systems was inevitable and that the longer reform was delayed, the more difficult it would become. Countries could avert the old-age crisis, but to do so, they would need to begin planning and educating the public straight away.

The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.